10: d'Orleans--308-311 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 582, 684, 836, 848

"Some flirtations are durable, for a young man who has paid court for a long time to a girl generally ends by making her his mistress, but this is not looked upon as at all dishonourable, for there are a great many unmarried women mothers, and some of them are held in as much respect as those [pages 309 and 310 contain illustration] [311] that are married, while marriage often follows the birth of a child. Moreover, if the girl informs her parents and reveals the name of her lover, the latter is bound to pay a fine of about fifteen rupees, or to marry her. All assaults upon women are taxed at varying rates, there being different fines for a kiss upon the mouth or upon the arm, and for rape."

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

electricians hugged each other, and, enchanted by the din, the audience began to drift away from the theatre and make for the dancing floor.

The second attraction in order of popularity was a love-court. A quadrangular arrangement of tables had been formed, covered by a thatched roof raised on posts decorated with woven bamboo representations of animals, weapons and phallic emblems. Seated round the tables in the interior of the square were the girls, and their suitors sat facing them. Between the couples had been placed offerings of food, brought by the girls. Originally a tribute to some ancient, forgotten fertility god, a primeval Thai Venus, the offerings would be given, next day, to the bonzes. All through the night the bantering of witticisms, the singing and the exchange of improvised verse would go on, accompanied by the accordion-like wheezings of the Kène, the Stone Age gourd pipes of Laos. Sometimes through a happy fault in the circuit the splutter and bellow of the loud-speakers would suddenly lapse, and you heard the beehive dronings of the communal love-making, the kènes, and the voice of the presiding bonze, preaching continually in an archaic, incomprehensible language from the wicker cage into which he had been fastened. The cage symbolized the protection of his religion from these earthly distractions. As soon as inspiration failed he would be relieved by the next on the rota of preachers, waiting now to take his place.

Love-courts are the accepted preliminary to the consummation of affairs of the heart, which — despite European conviction that romantic love is a Western invention — are accompanied in Laos by much versifying and mild, self-imposed frustrations. When, for instance, a well-known beauty is wooed by a number of suitors, a serenading match may be arranged on the veranda of her house to permit her to test under competitive conditions the poetic and musical capabilities of each of them. Complete pre-marital freedom is recognized, but much outward reserve is maintained. There is a time and place for everything. It is incorrect, for example, to

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moreover, the object of the utmost scorn on the part of the whole population, and their houses are relegated to points outside the muong, that is to say outside the city.

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No such practice exists in rural areas, and if a few girls grant their lovers great intimacies it is in the hope--a hope which is almost always realized--that marriage will be the result.

764 766

Death, burial, cremation. In principle, Laotians are supposed to cremate their dead. In this they are obedient to the ancient traditions which specified this ceremony, but since cremation is a costly practice poor people are simply buried.

In certain cases, as in deaths resulting from dysentery epidemics, from childbirth, from suicide, etc., the bodies are thrown into the river or its tributaries.

Laotians have no cemeteries enclosed by walls or barriers. A corner of the forest near the muong or village is reserved for this use and serves as a last resting place for those of the inhabitants who cannot be cremated or should not be thrown into the water. There, at the foot of the trees and in their shade, repose those adults and adolescents whose families did not even have means to buy the ritual cremation firewood, and also the children who never underwent the operation of "cutting the forelock" (1).

[881]

(1) This operation takes place at the age of thirteen and marks the transition from childhood to adolescence. It is the sign of nubility.

764 792

When it is to be buried, the body of the dead person is placed in a sort of coffin made of ax-hewn planks which are usually poorly joined and covered with colored paper burdened with ornamentation. Sometimes a mat is used, in simpler fashion, or else lattices made of split and crushed bamboo stalks like those which form the floors of houses. The whole is tied together with rattan or with bamboo bark.

This is the lot of destiny's outcasts. After a few family ceremonies and a feast given in the dead person's home [201]--the magnitude of which ceremonies and feast vary depending on the dead person's station in life and his family's resources--the bonzes, accompanied by a few pupils, come and recite the funeral orisons.

The bonzes are not supposed to look at the body during their prayers, and they hold up a screen called Talapat to hide their faces.

149; Reinach--166 G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

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Since there is not, so to speak, any class of salaried workers in Laos except in certain types of work and in transport by pirogues and rafts, the inhabitants of any given center lend one another their help in farming, harvesting, building houses or pirogues, etc. Taking turns, the one who has asked help of his neighbors will put on a celebration for them when the work is over, and will himself receive an invitation from someone else in return for help which he has given.

[192]

Laotian celebrations, in which the bonzes are never forgotten, are usually given under the verandas of the pagodas or in their dependencies, unless they take place in the host's own home or under sheds specially constructed for the purpose on one side. The latter is always the case in a "Ngan" given for those who have helped in building a house, and the same is true for a birth or marriage.

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Celebrations generally begin towards four or five in the afternoon when the heat is beginning to wane. They last all night and sometimes resume on the following day after the guests have relaxed for a few hours. Some "Ngans" go on in this way for nearly a week and are interrupted only by the coming of the Laotian sabbath, a day of absolute rest when only the preparation of food is permitted, and no work or pleasure. By the light of kerosene lamps borrowed here and there, or of resinous torches, the girls, who are decked out in all their finery, are stationed in a line squatting down against a wall or partition. Before them there are [221] vases made of copper, silver or porcelain. They all pretend to be busy with minor tasks and may imitate, for example, the preparation of food. But in reality this is only their way of keeping some kind of countenance.

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The adults and children of both sexes are massed at each end of the row of girls. Then the young men, their heads covered with scarves, come and squat down opposite the girls and with their heads still covered begin an animated conversation which soon turns into regular flirting. If there is enough space the orchestra takes up its position nearby and in the center, between the young people, are the singers, improvisers and "Kene" players. Cakes, fruit, quids of betel, cigarettes, rice brandy and various condiments are passed around.

Spectators who have not been specially invited come and stand behind the young people, as do passersby who drop in for a quid, a cigarette, a cup of brandy or a bowl of rice, or to listen to the songs and music for a little while.

527 From time to time a girl will get up and leave the celebration.
836 She is soon followed by a young man, and both disappear into the
584 shadows, escorted for form's sake by a little boy or girl. This is the beginning of a liaison and will doubtless end in marriage, unless the young gallant is in too much of a hurry, clumsy or flighty and finds himself faced with paying one of the special fines if he compromises the girl and refuses to make up for it.

782 Offerings to the pagodas. There are other "Ngans" which have a
527 half profane and half religious purpose. That is to say, they are
531 established either to thank heaven for a lucky event or to solicit its clemency. They may occur, for example, either to celebrate a return to health after a long illness, or the success of a trading season or hunting or fishing expedition, or to call down blessings from on high on a trip which is being made or planned, etc. These types of "Ngans" then involve offerings to the pagodas and to the bonzes, offerings which bear the name of "Tone-Pheung" (literally, wax cut in pieces). They are so named because of the wax imitation flowers which decorate [222] a kind of pyramid or small pagoda supporting them, called "Pha-Sate" (in French, Faithful to God).

These little edifices are built and decorated by the friends or guests with a rapidity, a taste and an elegance which would be astounding if we did not know the degree to which artistic feeling is innate in the Laotian, and if we were not aware of the prodigious skill with which he is endowed.

Built on a bamboo framework covered with pieces of banana wood, carved with festoons and ornamental moldings, and arranged in tiers of roofs, in minarets and in columns, these "Pha-Sate," which are always between one and two meters in height, seem to be made of ivory and affect an extraordinary variety of forms each of which is more graceful than the last and which seem to be inspired by the architecture of the pagodas of India, Cambodia and Burma.

It will not be in vain to note that the only purpose of these ephemeral edicules, which will keep their new look for only a short while, is merely to present the wax offering in a less banal and more artistic manner than if it had been given in the form of thick, heavy, massive blocks.

The "Pha-Sate" are mounted on stretchers which are carried by men. Besides their wax flowers, they are decorated with natural